Secret

25X1

DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

WEEKLY SUMMARY

Special Report

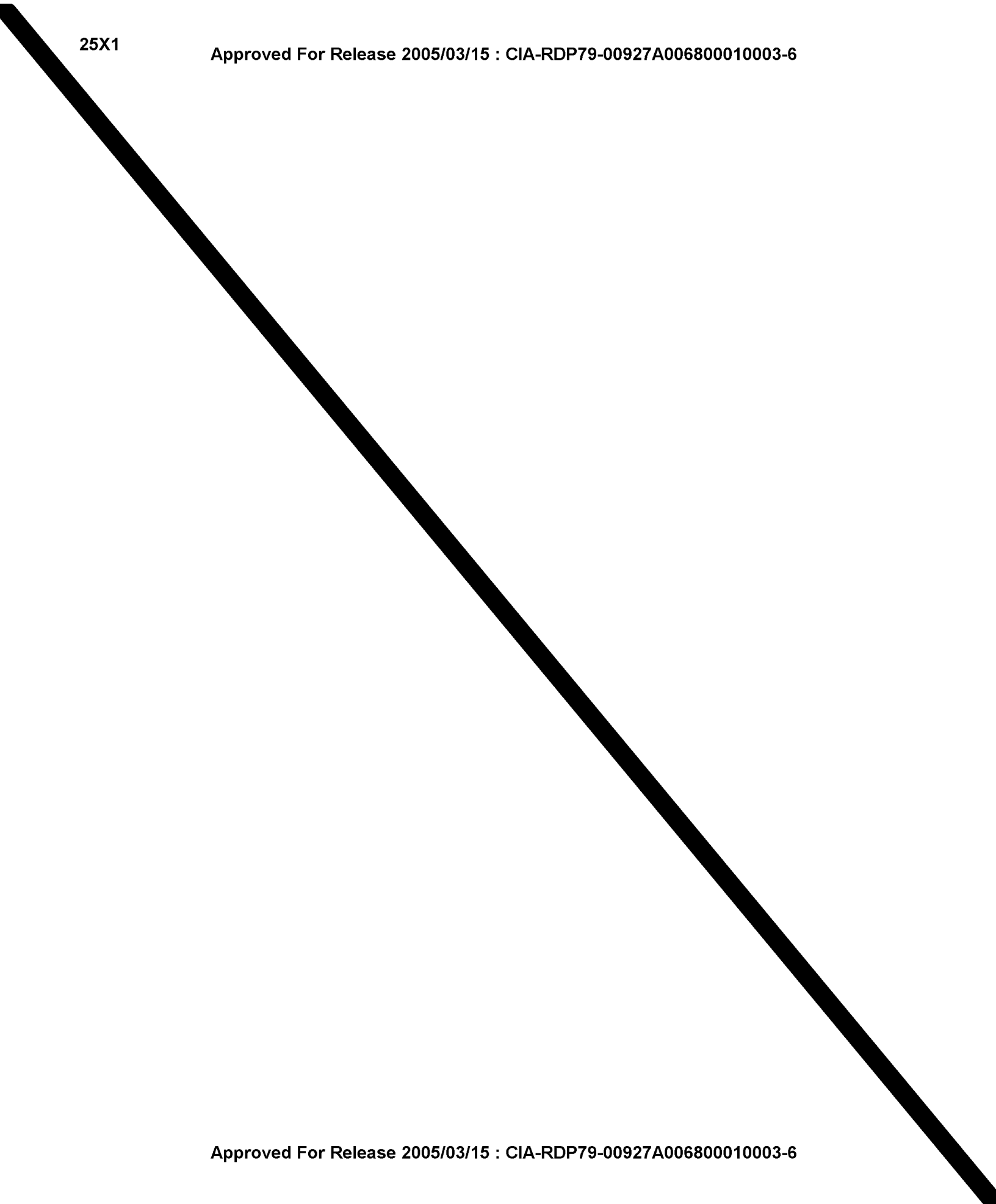
China's Cultural Revolution in 1968

Secret

39

6 December 1968
No. 0050/68B

Approved For Release 2005/03/15 : CIA-RDP79-00927A006800010003-6



Approved For Release 2005/03/15 : CIA-RDP79-00927A006800010003-6

CHINA'S CULTURAL REVOLUTION IN 1968

Last summer saw a new turning point in the violent course of the Cultural Revolution, and a drive to restore order is now in progress. This turnabout followed a spring and early summer when violence in China reached a crescendo nearly equal to that of the bloody summer of 1967. Armed clashes and political infighting were particularly intense in southern China. In one province bordering Vietnam, the four principal cities were gutted by fire, and during one period the vital rail line to Hanoi was disrupted.

The new turn came at the end of July, when word went out from Peking that violence by Red Guards or anyone else was to end--by military intervention if necessary. In most places, the army has carried out these orders with a will. The Red Guard organizations--the shock troops of "revolution"--have been badly mauled, and many have been destroyed. The more "radical" Red Guard groups responsive to extremists in Peking have borne the brunt of the attack.

Vigilante groups organized by provincial military authorities cracked student heads with a vengeance, and many old scores were settled by officials previously under Red Guard attack. These vigilante groups are composed of workers and are led by army troops. They have been told that they will occupy schools and universities "permanently" to see that students never get out of line again.

The older students, who tended to be leaders of the Red Guard movement, are being summarily "graduated," even though they have had no schooling in more than two years. Many are being sent to army-run state farms in remote areas. [redacted] It is evident from all this that students--the backbone of the Red Guards--are no longer being treated as the apple of Mao's eye and are not getting his protection.

25X1

The "New Look" in the Revolution

The change in the political climate in late July made it possible to resume the restoration of administrative machinery in the provinces. The process of forming new governments was started in January 1967, but encountered repeated setbacks. Now, however, all provinces have new "revolutionary committees" to replace the old provincial party secretaries and government councils. Most of the provincial revolutionary committees, particularly those set up in 1968, are dominated by military officials who were under radical attack throughout much of the Cultural Revolution.

Now that the formal governmental apparatus has been restored, work is going forward on the difficult job of rebuilding the party machine, virtually dismantled in the early stages of the Cultural Revolution. This task has hardly started, but a big first step was taken in October, when the central committee held a plenum--the first in two years--to announce that the long overdue ninth party congress would be convened at some unspecified time.

This decision, however, has by no means settled the touchy question of rebuilding the party apparatus. Radicals in the Peking leadership appear to be engaged in a polemic with the more moderate forces that are working toward stabilization. They have been expressing themselves through Shanghai newspapers, which have frequently served as an outlet for the views of the Maoist radicals. Since September, Shanghai media have been underscoring the radical position, which calls for a further housecleaning within the party and a large infusion of new blood from the Red Guard organizations. By contrast, the Peking press has been taking an ambiguous line. This difference in emphasis became more evident while the plenum was meeting in secret in October. Ignoring some points and stressing others, the Shanghai media expanded on official Peking editorials to warn of the dangers of allowing experienced party cadres to dominate the new party structure.

The plenum clearly failed to end the debate. Two weeks after the final communiqué was issued, a Shanghai paper went far beyond Peking commentary in demanding a new purge of party officials, making it clear that it had in mind individuals who still held important posts. The editorial accused these unnamed individuals of using their positions to exclude "rebels" from influential posts in the nascent party organization and of protecting old colleagues who have been "proved" guilty of political crimes.

Provincial congresses of party members are meeting now to study a draft charter for the revived party organization, produced by the plenum, apparently

in preparation for the upcoming party congress. As if sensing that this congress may be stacked against the "radicals," one recent Shanghai editorial went to the extraordinary length of insisting that members "have the right to go over the heads of their superiors to report to the central authorities and the Chairman." Division on this issue runs very deep. Commenting on the problem to foreign visitors, Foreign Minister Chen Yi recently remarked that continued disagreements could again force postponement of the party congress.

The first task of the congress--which, barring new and more serious disputes, is likely to be convened next spring--will be to name a new central committee. Less than one third of the 172 full and alternate members of the previous committee are still active. In the light of recent developments, it seems likely that the new central committee will be dominated by the military and will have a "conservative," nonrevolutionary cast.

Origins of the "Revolution"

These developments follow two and a half years of the most violent kind of political turmoil, which at times has brought China to the brink of anarchy. It has been a bizarre situation in which the regime has, in effect, been conducting revolution against itself.

The Cultural Revolution had its origin in a wide range of complex factors, but Mao Tse-tung unquestionably played a central role in setting off the upheaval. In the early and mid-1960s, Mao apparently believed himself to be increasingly at odds with many leading members of the Chinese regime. This belief was partly paranoia, partly justified. Mao also believed the Chinese revolution--his revolution--was running into the sands. Revolutionary enthusiasm and elan had been lost. Bureaucratic buck-passing and inertia were growing; technical experts were vying with "revolutionary" generalists for authority in making decisions.

Mao's answer to these problems was an attempt to rekindle the "revolutionary" fervor that had helped bring him to power. He had apparently developed an almost mystical faith in the power of "permanent revolution" conducted by mobilized and indoctrinated masses, and sought by this means to counteract growing cynicism and prevent Soviet-style revisionism from infecting China. Many officials and probably some important members of the regime, however, distrusted the kind of unrealistic mass enthusiasm that had led to the disasters of the Great Leap Forward in the late 1950s. These men resisted by dragging their feet and interpreting Mao's wishes in the light of what they themselves regarded as sound policy.

This apparently convinced Mao that some of the men in line to succeed him were selling out the revolution, and he moved against them in the fall and

winter of 1965. Mao's initial attack centered on the propaganda apparatus of the party, which he apparently believed had failed in the task of maintaining "revolutionary" fervor at a high pitch. The attack on the propaganda machinery culminated in the purge of Peng Chen, a full member of the politburo and party boss of Peking, in the spring of 1966.

This not only upset the balance of political power at the apex of authority, but almost certainly aroused the fears of other top leaders. It seems likely that some of them plotted against the others in an effort to exploit the situation for their own advantage.

The net effect, in this atmosphere, was to persuade Mao that many of the men close around him were not to be trusted, and that the entire party apparatus was suspect. At a plenum of the central committee in August 1966, the axe fell on Liu Shao-chi--head of state and number-two man in the party. Other veteran leaders were soon cut down as well. Following the plenum, Mao and Lin Piao unleashed the newly formed Red Guards against the entire party.

The Course of the Conflict

Events began to generate their own momentum as the struggle surged back and forth. Authorities in the provinces sought to defend themselves against Red Guard activists sent out from Peking to bring them down. They organized local "Red Guards" of their own and pitted them against the interlopers. These efforts proved fruitless, however, when the army was ordered to restore order at the end of January 1967--suppressing both the Maoist Red Guards and local groups defending the provincial leaders. The party leaders were supplanted by military officials who had leading roles in provisional governing bodies set up at that time.

In the spring, following a brief respite from violent political struggle, Mao and the radicals grouped around him launched new attacks on "power holders taking the capitalist road"--the army men and bureaucrats who had replaced the purged party officials. Army leaders in particular were accused of acting in February to suppress the Red Guards--the instrument of the extremists in the Cultural Revolution Group in Peking. Covert resistance on the part of those under attack merely fed the flames. By early summer, armed clashes between opposing Red Guard groups had spread across the country and were growing in intensity.

More open defiance of the radical leaders in Peking on the part of the Wuhan Military Region commander in July led to a major crisis. In response to the Wuhan challenge, radicals in the capital opened an across-the-board attack on the entire military establishment in August 1967. This move may have nearly cost the Maoists the support of the military leadership. By the end

of the month, tensions had reached the breaking point and troubles were mounting.

More moderate elements, with substantial military backing, apparently forced a change of course in early September. Rampaging Red Guards were curbed and a number of other steps were taken toward restoring a semblance of order. These moves were fitful at best, however, and frequently were the result of painful compromise. Although partly curbed, the Red Guards still enjoyed many special privileges and clearly remained under a protective umbrella.

This lull was also short-lived. The winter of 1967-68 was a period of confusion and conflicting political statements, with modest steps toward restoration of administrative order alternating with bouts of renewed fighting and political savagery.

In late March, a new purge of the military--which included the political demise of the army's acting chief of staff--ushered in a new surge of radical ferment. Political divisions sharpened and the new provincial administrative organs appeared on the verge of being undercut by renewed agitation. Fighting rapidly spread, particularly in south China. This open conflict was halted only by the policy turnabout of late July 1968.

The Forces at Work

Struggle between Peking and the provinces has been the most visible aspect of the political civil war that has been tearing China. There is also resistance to Maoist policies at the center--conducted behind a facade of unity. "Revolutionary" policies have been resisted and at times blocked by a loose coalition of leaders in the military establishment and in the government machinery, for whom Premier Chou En-lai is the symbolic leader and primary spokesman.

These men would like to limit the damage done to the economy, administrative machinery, and cohesiveness of the state by the excesses of the "revolution." Many have themselves been under poster attack by radical Red Guard factions aligned with the extremist, central Cultural Revolution Group, and thus would like to damp down the "revolution" to protect their positions. Their basic motivation is primarily nationalistic. It seems likely that more and more people have swung over to this "opposition" with each destructive lurch to the "left" in the course of the Cultural Revolution.

At the moment, then, a group of men in Peking who have almost certainly been at odds among themselves for much of the past two years is implementing a relatively "conservative" program of minimizing violence, dismantling the Red Guards as a political force, and re-establishing a workable administrative apparatus. The degree to which this program has been forced on Mao and his radical associates by the more

moderate opposition, and the degree to which Mao himself, recognizing the cost of continued "revolution," is now making a virtue of necessity, is still unclear.

Moreover, the present program is by no means 100-percent "conservative." Radical and typically Maoist programs are being pushed in a number of fields with apparent vigor. A drive to "simplify administration," involving the wholesale displacement of administrative personnel and a segment of the urban working force, is now in full swing. Large numbers of people have been sent to the countryside to work in agriculture on what is intended to be a semipermanent basis. This drive has already caused severe dislocations in administrative work

25X1

At the same time, innovations are being introduced in the educational system. State-run primary schools in the countryside, formerly attended mainly by children of local cadres, are being abandoned in favor of schools run and paid for by local farm brigades; the new schools presumably will be more egalitarian. Indeed, the brigade seems on the way to becoming the main administrative unit in the countryside, displacing the smaller work team. In some areas, the same results are being achieved by merging the work teams, on which major emphasis has been placed since the Great Leap Forward.

In south and east China, individual communes are announcing plans--apparently hastily prepared--to confiscate or reduce peasants' private plots, collectivize pigs, and abandon or modify the work-point wage system--the present basis of payment for nonsalaried work throughout the country.

These reports may be related to another drive involving a wholesale re-examination of official "social classification"--rich peasant, poor peasant, landlord, and so forth--which is now under way in Kwangtung and perhaps other provinces in east and south China. Because job assignments, privileges, and official attitudes depend largely on such classifications, this drive has been causing considerable anxiety wherever it has been implemented.

The new experiments bear a a strong family resemblance to those measures introduced in the period just preceding the Cultural Revolution, and suggest that Mao may be returning to his strategy of the mid-1960s in the pursuit of his increasingly inflexible aims.

Mao's Position and Character

The history of the Cultural Revolution thus far, however, dictates caution in announcing its impending conclusion. Mao Tse-tung and his defense minister

Lin Piao, still seem to retain the personal loyalty of many key military commanders. As Mao himself is fond of saying, military support is the fundamental source of political power in China or anywhere else. The army has not been a responsive or effective instrument for "revolution" in Mao's eyes but, with few exceptions, army commanders have not been willing to defy the Maoists openly. It is this ambivalent position of military leaders--they disagree with Mao's policies but are loyal to the man himself--that makes Mao dangerous and gives him the capability to renew the initiative in untried directions. Twice before, Mao has retreated in the face of stiff opposition in the army and the bureaucracy to his destructive policies; each time he soon resumed the offensive with renewed vigor.

Both in Peking and in the provinces, the current leadership is everywhere split between those who had vigorously pushed the Cultural Revolution and others--mainly military men and old party cadres--who had resisted the radicals. Although this coalition of opponents of revolution now seems to have the upper hand, the extremists around Mao in Peking may still possess sufficient strength to frustrate some of the plans of more moderate elements within the leadership group. Bitter political struggles between the two camps probably lie ahead.

Mao is still described as the "great helmsman" of the "revolution," and he has thus far been able to protect his chief lieutenants, even in adversity. Although the latest policy change occurred over four months ago, no major figures associated with currently discredited extremist policies have yet been disgraced and removed.

If old-line cadres now in positions of authority should sabotage the more irrational aspects of Mao's vision of a selfless, egalitarian and "revolutionary" China he may become frustrated again and attempt to lash out as he did in 1966.

25X1
25X1

Mao has always been an apostle of violence and revolutionary mass action.

[redacted]

Mao does not have a pathological love of disorder for its own sake. He has a high tolerance for it, however, and probably will never be satisfied with stability achieved at the expense of his revolutionary programs. In his earlier career, Mao demonstrated the ability to change his strategy to meet new situations, but it seems likely he has now lost much of his flexibility.

25X1

[redacted]

25X1

[redacted] Mao's probable inclination to persist in a course already set--continued "revolution"--would also be reinforced by the realization that his time is running out.

The chances for repairing the damage done by the Cultural Revolution and moving ahead with positive programs of long-range development thus seem in question so long as Mao retains the capability of influencing the course of events. Those in the leadership seeking to end the Cultural Revolution probably recognize this and regard the departure of Mao as an active political force as a necessary step. At this point, however, they are probably not sufficiently united to remove him by force and probably do not have the support for such a move from the military establishment, which would be essential for success.

The immediate prospect is thus for a period of stalemate during which conservative elements attempt to restrict Mao's freedom of action by means short of eliminating him as a political force. Such a situation is inherently unstable. Unless Mao solves the problem by dying first, it seems likely that forces in opposition to him will be under increasing pressure to unite and encapsulate the old man as a palace prisoner.

Problems Ahead

The regime that follows the group now at the top in Peking will be beset with formidable problems. The first of these will be to end the political infighting that has plagued the top leadership ever since the start of the Cultural Revolution three years ago. We do not know which men will play key roles in a new regime but it seems clear that no candidate with anything like Mao's charisma is available to impose unity on a group of ambitious leaders divided by old wounds and unsettled scores left from the Cultural Revolution. At best, the kind of collegial leadership that seems likely to evolve will probably move uncertainly in its efforts to cope with the problems of reconstruction.

The new leaders will be severely hampered, moreover, by the disarray in the machinery of government. The party has been virtually destroyed, and it will take long and patient work to rebuild it as an effective political instrument. The bureaucracy has fared better than the party, but it, too, has suffered serious damage and is in need of extensive repair.

Burdened with these problems, the successors to the present leadership will be attempting to rule a demoralized and possibly a fractious nation. The relaxation of central authority which has been a by-product of the Cultural Revolution seems likely to cause persistent trouble. Once the instruments of coercion are back in operation, the people can probably be forced back into their pre-revolutionary subservience, but there will be resistance. A more serious problem is the development of regional and provincial power groups pursuing

their own ends at the expense of the center. Regionalism, always a problem in China, has received impetus and an opportunity to grow, although it is very much weaker than countervailing centralizing forces.

Ultimately, we would expect to see the emergence of a reasonably effective, united group of leaders in Peking. They will be Communists in a broad sense, but not Maoist revolutionaries. The forces of nationalism that brought Mao and the Communist Party to power in 1949 are still a powerful political cement. The new leaders--whoever they might be--will probably be pragmatic men motivated strongly by nationalistic considerations. They will reject Mao's revolutionary dogma because it has proved irrelevant to China's problems, but they may well continue to treat the old man as a semi-deity--a Lenin and George Washington rolled into one--while ignoring the content of his programs.

25X1

* * *